



# ***SOUTHCOM QUALITY OF LIFE (SCQL) MAILER APRIL 2003***

## **ON THE HORIZON:**

### ***Military One Source:***

We are currently working with OSD and the Army's Southeast Regional Office to hook all US SOUTHCOM personnel and their families into a test program called MilitaryOneSource. (This will include those assigned throughout the AOR, GTMO, and Miami). MilitaryOneSource will be a 24-hour/7 days a week service that will provide our military members and families access to information on personal support, referrals to military and community services, articles, newsletters, and confidential consultation. When we are completely integrated into this test program, you will be able to access this service via the internet or via telecon, where 800 numbers don't work, a special toll free number will be established. Phones are answered live by a qualified staff (degreed, credentialed consultants and specialized research teams) and there will also be a Spanish language line. This program will help fill the gap where Family Support Centers do not exist and will augment Family Support Center services where they do exist. It will also provide a comprehensive array of prepaid educational materials. We will provide you with access instruction once we are ready to implement. Some of the categories of information that will be available:

<b><i>Life</i></b>	<b><i>Family</i></b>	<b><i>Money</i></b>	<b><i>Work</i></b>
Work life balance	Parenting	Budgeting	Deployment preparation
Stress and overload	Child care	Getting out of Debt	Returning from deployment
Relationships	Discipline & safety	Credit and collections	Relocation
Health & well-being`	Pregnancy & fertility	Saving and investing	Communication
Home improvements	Teen communication	Basic tax planning	Job stress and burn out
Pet care	Single parenting	Home buying/renting	Career planning
Lawn care	Blended families	Saving for college	PCS/TDY issues
Legal issues	K-12 education	Paying for elder care	Education and Training
Living and Disability	College Planning		
Divorce & Separation	Senior health		
Grief and loss	Caring for older relatives		
Retirement planning			

## **PERSONNEL, EDUCATION, AND TRAINING ISSUES**

### **ARMY:**

#### **Sergeants Major Course postponed, shortened**

by Master Sgt. Lisa Hunter

FORT BLISS, Texas (Army News Service, March 27, 2003) - ***The resident Sergeants Major Course, Class 54, slated to start in August, has been postponed to January because of current deployments. The course will also be condensed to six months from its usual nine-month curriculum,*** according to Lt. Col. John Kirby, assistant commandant at the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy.

***"This is a one-time change to accommodate all the soldiers who are participating in Operation Iraqi Freedom," Kirby said. "Our folks in the Directorate of Training and Doctrine are currently reworking the program of instruction to accommodate the more condensed course schedule."***

Prior to August 1995, the Sergeants Major Course was six months, but was extended to nine months after the Battle Staff Noncommissioned Officer Course was added, said Sgt. Maj. John Wyche, the Deputy Chief of Staff G3 sergeant major. ***The Battle Staff NCO Course is used to prepare staff sergeants through sergeants major to serve in staff positions at battalion and higher level. The course will be removed for Class 54, Wyche said. Class 54 starts Jan. 12, 2004 and runs through June 30. Students may report as early as Dec. 1, and no later than Jan. 5. However, they are authorized to move their families early to Fort Bliss.*** They can also request an exception to policy to retain housing at their current duty station. The losing installation commander will be the approving authority for those waivers. ***"Affording students the opportunity to move their families early gives them a chance to move into government housing, stabilize exceptional family members and enroll children in school," Kirby explained. Children must be enrolled in El Paso schools by July 27, in order to attend the first day of school, Aug. 19. Deployed soldiers scheduled to attend the 17-day resident phase of the Non-Resident Sergeants Major Course June 7 - 20, will be rescheduled to attend later this year. Those not deployed are still slated to attend the June course.***

(Editor's note: Master Sgt. Lisa Hunter is the public affairs NCO at the Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss.)

## **ARMY Activates Army Family Assistance Hotline**

(Note to media outlets: Media outlets are requested to publish the hotline number with the caveat that the hotline is intended for use by Army family members, not the general public.)

Alexandria, Va. -- ***The U.S. Army Community and Family Support Center, in conjunction with the Army Family Liaison Office, has established a toll-free Family Assistance Hotline. The number is (800) 833-6622.***

***"The mission of our Family Assistance Hotline is to provide Army families caring support in the form of accurate information, useful resources, and helpful referrals related to family issues,"*** said Brig. Gen. Robert L. Decker, commander of the USACFSC, the Army agency responsible for Morale, Welfare, and Recreation. This Family Assistance Hotline is a 'safety net' for those who have exhausted all other resources," said Decker. "We will do everything we can to help each and every caller."

The hotline is intended for use only by family members of soldiers on active duty as well as those in the Army National Guard and the Army Reserve called to active duty. After hearing a short, recorded message, callers will be able to speak to hotline staff members who have access to extensive reference materials. Staff will be unable to answer questions about casualties or soldiers wounded or missing in action. Because of the sensitivity of this information, the Army's Casualty Assistance Office will first contact the soldier's immediate family. Once the Army is certain that the soldier's next of kin have been notified, information about soldiers' deaths will then be released to the public through news releases and other means such as the media and Department of Defense Web sites. Due to operational security and force protection concerns, CFSC hotline staff cannot provide locator services (addresses) for soldiers or units, or information about operational matters. The hotline is toll free when called from the continental United States, Hawaii, Alaska, Puerto Rico, Guam and the Virgin Islands. Hotline staff will answer calls from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily Eastern Standard Time to answer family support-related questions. Emergency assistance will be provided between the hours of 8 p.m. and 8 a.m. EST.

"Our staff will assist all callers by listening, explaining, and directing them to the most helpful resources we can," said Gail Lovisone, manager of CFSC's Family Assistance Hotline call center. Lovisone emphasized that the first place families of active duty soldiers should contact is Army Community Service or the unit rear detachment at the installation from which the soldiers deployed. The Army National Guard and the Army Reserve state and regional support commands also operate assistance lines, though they may not always be toll free. Information is also available at [www.guardfamily.org](http://www.guardfamily.org) and [www.army.mil/usar](http://www.army.mil/usar). "We may often refer callers to the installation because installation ACS staff have local resource telephone numbers, and more detailed information," explained Lovisone. ***In addition to local and Army level assistance via telephone, family members can find answers to many routine questions about family readiness, Army Community Service, and deployment support resources online at the ACS Web site, [www.goacs.org](http://www.goacs.org), and at the Army Family Liaison Office website, [www.aflo.org](http://www.aflo.org).*** "We anticipate a high volume of calls, so we strongly urge people to use those Web sites as a first stop," noted Lovisone. Recognizing that not all households have Internet connectivity, Lovisone suggested families use computers at installation ACS centers or at on-post or local civilian libraries.

### ***2,000+ Soldiers Stabilize High School Seniors***

(Source: U.S. Army Public Affairs)

Almost 2,200 military families have joined the stabilization program for soldiers with high school seniors. ***The program began in 2001, allowing soldiers to extend their tour of duty at their current duty station for an additional year so a family member may graduate from high school.*** This initiative by the Army leadership is a key component of Well-Being as it provides increased stability and predictability for families. As of February 6, 2003, the Total Army's Personnel Command (PERSCOM) approved stabilization requests for 1,826 enlisted soldiers, disapproved four, and had 20 requests pending. On the officer side, 353 were approved, six disapproved, and two requests pending.

***Soldiers must request stabilization from PERSCOM before their children begin their high school junior year. The request is made on a DA Form 4187.*** A letter from the high school stating when the student is expected to graduate must be attached to the form.

## **AIR FORCE:**

### **USAF Stop Loss**

Effective 2 May 2003, the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force (Manpower & Reserve Affairs) will authorize the use of Stop Loss to retain specific skills needed to meet national security objectives. For stop-lossed personnel, voluntary separations, discharges and retirements which would be effective on or after 2 May 2003 are suspended. Stop Loss does not preclude reassignment of personnel IAW existing directives. Stop Loss policy will be reviewed on a 60-day cycle; however, as operational requirements change, AFSCs and/or other categories of personnel may be released from or added to stop loss roster. SCJ1 is working to analyze the effects on SOUTHCOM USAF personnel.

**E-8 promotion rates up; critical skills even higher By Staff Sgt. A.J. Bosker, Air Force Print News, and Staff Sgt. Matt Miller, Air Force Personnel Center Public Affairs**

**WASHINGTON** – The Air Force selected 1,612 of 15,831 eligible master sergeants for promotion March 19 under a familiar critical skills program that for the first time is being applied to E-8 and E-9 promotion cycles. Under the Chronic Critical Skills program, ***officials identified 25 career fields to be classified as “critical” skills for the 03E8 promotion cycle. While the overall selection rate for this cycle, 10.18 percent, is the highest seen across the board since 1987,*** the move pushed average selection percentages, depending on the multiplier applied, to anywhere from 9.64 to 30.88 percent. “We’re now including E-8 and E-9s because of critical senior noncommissioned officer shortages in these AFSCs that are seriously impacting mission readiness,” said Chief Master Sgt. Carol Dockery, chief of enlisted promotions and evaluation at the Pentagon. The effort to expand the CCS program to the two highest enlisted ranks began during the 03E8 central evaluation board and final approval came only days ago, said officials. To get there, those competing for promotion in designated AFSCs are assigned a higher selection rate, 1.2 times the Air Force average, Dockery said. For example, an AFSC with a 15 percent selection rate would receive an 18 percent promotion rate when placed on the CCS list. “Now, more than ever, it’s absolutely essential that we balance our enlisted force structure to meet our expeditionary force requirements,” said Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Gerald R. Murray. “We must continue to use the CCS skills program and all other available tools, such as selective reenlistment bonuses, incentive pays and retraining, if we are to achieve balance in our force.”

***Senior NCOs in AFSCs manned at or below 70 percent with less and 25 people eligible for promotion received a multiplier of 3.0; those manned at or below 70 percent with more than 25 people eligible for promotion received a multiplier of 1.4; and those manned above 70 percent but less than 90 percent received a multiplier of 1.2. Future CCS skills will be announced prior to the central evaluation board for each promotion cycle. The cycle 03E8 Senior Master Sergeant Evaluation Board met Jan. 22 to Feb. 7. The average total score of selectees during the cycle was 669.10 points. Average selectee score breakdowns are:***

- 36 points, time in grade
- 21.01 points, time in service
- 135 points, performance reports
- 20.08 points for decorations
- 68.83 points for U.S. Air Force Supervisory Examination
- 388.17 points for evaluation board score

In addition, the average selectee has 5.04 years time in grade and 19.99 years time in service. Those selected for promotion to senior master sergeant automatically receive a school quota for the Senior NCO Academy. And 357 non-selects are scheduled to attend with a list of 720 alternates, officials said.

Senior master sergeant selectees will be promoted beginning in April. The complete list of promotion and Senior NCO Academy selections will be posted on the AFPC Web site by March 22 at <http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/eprom>.

## **Contact Center Moves to 24-hour Operations**

**AIR FORCE PERSONNEL CENTER** –Airmen everywhere can now talk with customer service agents about personnel issues 24 hours a day thanks to the recently expanded hours of the Air Force Contact Center here. People with questions about assignments, benefits, pay and more can speak to a customer service representative ***toll-free at (866) 229-7074 or DSN 665-5000. Online services, which***

include a chat feature, can be found at [www.afpc.randolph.af.mil](http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil) by clicking the Contact Center button.

## Memo Serving as Officer Career Guide

by Staff Sgt. C. Todd Lopez

Air Force Print News

03/07/03 - **WASHINGTON** -- A recent memorandum from the secretary of the Air Force regarding the selection process for general officers could very well serve as a guide to all officers -- regardless of rank -- as they chart out their careers. The memorandum is one of a series of initiatives designed to help explain how officials intend to incorporate deliberate force development throughout the Air Force. In the memorandum, Dr. James G. Roche discussed the instructions he gives to promotion boards before they consider an individual for promotion to brigadier or major general. He asked all Air Force officers to consider those requirements set out in the instructions. "As I was reviewing the instructions for a recent general officer's board, it occurred to me that you might be interested in what I was telling a board about the kind of officers that should become generals," the secretary said in the memorandum. "I encourage you to discuss this with your mentors." Among the *qualities the secretary looks for are a proven ability to be proactive rather than reactive, a breadth of career experiences and an understanding of the expeditionary air and space force concept.* In addition, he said, general officer selectees are those known for making things happen. "*The Air Force needs officers who can conceptualize, chart strategies and formulate policies, as opposed to merely organizing solutions to problems,*" Roche said. "The board should find those officers who provided the direction and force that shaped outcomes rather than reacted successfully to a series of events." *The secretary also stressed the need for officers to possess a variety of backgrounds, strengths and levels of operational and technical expertise. Such a background includes experience in administrative, support and technical positions. For line officers, joint-duty experience is a significant factor. And where appropriate, he explained, command experience remained an important consideration.* He stressed that the Air Force focus on force development will help meet requirements for these leaders and better meet the developmental needs. "For those eligible to command, demonstrated performance as a commander is, and will continue to be, a key factor in selection for advancement," Roche said. Finally, the secretary identified a keen understanding of and commitment to the expeditionary air and space force concept as an important trait to have. In particular, he said, officers vying for general must be able to explain the value of air and space capabilities, must have an understanding of the Air Force's contribution to overall national security and must understand each Air Force individual's contribution to the overall EAF concept. "An understanding of the full spectrum of expeditionary air and space force and air and space operation is a cornerstone for selection to general officer grade ... *the Air Force needs general officers that can lead the Air Force through the evolutionary change as an air and space force,*" the secretary said. "*To support this effort, the Air Force needs leaders who ... don't just do, but who also can conceptualize what needs to be done.*"

Those potential leaders can be identified in part as officers who are comfortable with change, who are creative and who are flexible, Roche added. "*Above all, promotion boards look for officers with a commitment to air and space power and the Air Force as an institution, rather than a particular organization or community within it.*"

## Overseas Short Tour TDY Deferment Policy

Air Force is finalizing changes to the time on station window for deferring newly assigned members from overseas unaccompanied short-tour assignments from contingency TDY deployment. Currently, AF members will not deploy upon return from a short-tour for 60 days (AFI 36-2110 and AFI 10-403). Proposed change will lengthen that exemption to six (6) months in recognition of the time members need to stabilize their lives. Waivers to the 6-month sanctuary for operational requirements will be at the Wg/CV level.

## Testing Policy for Deployed Air Force Personnel

***In circumstances where students must test while deployed, the TCO at the base where the unit is currently assigned must contact AU/CFRR at Maxwell AFB, DSN 493-8128, to determine if an official TCF already exists for the deployed location.*** If a TCF is already established for the location, the TCO follows test transfer procedures outlined in this Catalog. If there is no TCF at the deployed location, either of two procedures may be followed: (1) A new TCF may be established at the deployed site (must follow procedures as outlined in the AFIADL Catalog), or (2) the commander of the unit to be deployed may sign a letter appointing an officer or SNCO to serve as test administrator during the deployment. When a letter is used, it must include the name of the appointed test administrator, names of the students to be tested, and the mailing address of the deployed location. The base TCF is responsible for maintaining the letter. If the tests are to be hand carried, the newly assigned test administrator must coordinate with the TCO and sign out the tests from the TCF and transport them in a secure manner (i.e., locked (briefcase)). The newly designated test administrator must administer the tests according to testing procedures as outlined in the AFIADL Catalog.

## CDC/PME Extensions Due to Current Events

**CDC Enrollees** AFIADL recognizes that some bases/units/personnel are being tasked to support Real World Events and, therefore, some AFIADL students may not be able to complete their course within the time allowed. Due to this situation, AFIADL is allowing Training Managers to request and be granted the “maximum extension” for those students affected. This will not be “automatic” and should only include those whom are tasked to directly support the operation.

- Once you have identified those affected, process the initial 4 month extension through local channels (PC-III/MILPDS) or -submit the “[request for extension form](#)” for those requiring the additional time. You can fax it to DSN 596-6143/3208.
- If your personnel have other issues that may affect their ability to complete their CDCs, please contact Ms Mona Mills at DSN 596-4615

3. .

**PME Enrollees:** AFIADL recognizes that some bases/units/personnel are being tasked to support the War on Terrorism and, therefore, some AFIADL students may not be able to complete their course within the time allowed. Please advise those individuals enrolled in PME courses to contact the appropriate school ([CEPME](#), [SOS](#), [ACSC](#), [AWC](#)) if they feel they cannot complete their course requirements within the time allowed.



## **Contact Center Moves to 24-hour ops**

03/19/03 - **RANDOLPH AIR FORCE BASE (AFPN)** -- *Airmen everywhere can now talk with customer service agents about personnel issues 24 hours a day* thanks to the recently expanded hours of the Air Force Contact Center here. People with questions about assignments, benefits, pay and more can speak to a customer service representative toll-free at (866) 229-7074 or DSN 665-5000. Online services, which include a chat feature, can be found at [www.afpc.randolph.af.mil](http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil) by clicking the Contact Center button. (Courtesy of AFPC News Service)

## **Medical Care for Airmen Affected by Stop-Loss**

*by Maj. John J. Thomas*

*Air Force Personnel Center Public Affairs*

03/19/03 - **RANDOLPH AIR FORCE BASE, Texas (AFPN)** -- *A previously overlooked provision of law allows up to four months of Tricare transitional health care benefits for airmen separating from the service after having been retained under Stop-Loss.* The benefits will apply to any airman separating after the current and any future Stop-Loss actions, according to officials at the Air Force Personnel Center here. Because of an administrative oversight, more than 5,000 airmen retained on active duty under the October 2001 to August 2002 Stop-Loss did not get word of the benefit, officials said. The benefit was part of the 2002 Defense Authorization Act. Letters sent to those former airmen tell them they can file for reimbursement of medical expenses incurred during the 60- to 120-day period after they left the service. But they will not be reimbursed for insurance premiums they may have paid, said Judith Warner, chief of the career assistance and relocation office at the center here. According to the law, benefits begin on an individual's official date of separation and cannot be adjusted. Individuals who served more than six years on active-duty are entitled to 120 days of coverage. Those with fewer than six years are entitled to 60 days of coverage. "It's only for a short time but this is a nice benefit, when you look at it," said Lt. Gen. Richard E. "Tex" Brown, deputy chief of staff for personnel at the Pentagon. "Not only for now but for the future. "It'll make it easier for individuals to transition after they've made that extra sacrifice (of being affected by Stop-Loss)," the general said. Air Force officials learned of the law's provision when a concerned former major called to ask if airmen affected by Stop-Loss were covered, said Warner. "We asked for a legal opinion by the AFPC and air staff legal (officials) and received an interpretation from both that the law covered everyone impacted by Stop-Loss," she said. Information was then sent to Air Force transition offices in early November to explain the situation and how to extend those benefits to airmen who had not yet separated, she said. Analysts then began to identify and notify each affected person. People eligible for coverage who have paid for health care expenses out of their pocket may submit a claim form (Department of Defense Form 2642) to Tricare with a copy of the bill to be reimbursed, officials said. The law does not affect retiring airmen who were held over as result of Stop-Loss because they already retain a continuing entitlement to retiree health care benefits. Assistance is available from a benefits counselor at military treatment facilities and from Tricare regional offices. The worldwide Tricare Information Center toll free number is (888) 363-2273. Claims information and forms are available at <https://tricare.osd.mil> by clicking on "TRICARE Map" on the left-hand side of the home page and by using the "search" feature. People can call the AFPC's family matters operations branch at (800) 581-9437 for assistance. (Courtesy of AFPC News Service)

## Higher Air Force Promotion Rates to Senior NCOs in Critical Skills

Chronic Critical Shortage (CCS) was designed to help reduce staff, technical and master sergeant shortages in certain sortie-generating and readiness-related skill. The AF is expanding the CCS skill program to include those eligible to senior and chief master sergeant. CCS skills manned at or below 70 percent with less than 25 people eligible for promotion will receive a multiplier of 3.0 (i.e., Combat Control, Para rescue etc.). CCS skills manned at or below 70 percent with more than 25 people eligible for promotion receive a multiplier of 1.4 (i.e., Readiness, In-Flight Refueling, Air Traffic Control etc.). CCS skills manned over 70 percent but less than 90 percent will receive a multiplier of 1.2 (i.e., Aerospace Maintenance, Aircrew Life Support etc.). The first senior NCOs to benefit from this change are those on the calendar year 2003 E8 (Senior Master Sergeant) promotion list.

## MARINES:

### Marine Corps Individual Augmentee (IA) Stabilization Policy

The Marine Corps has announced that Marines (active and reserve component) currently serving as IA's will not be rotated or released from active duty for 120 days from 20 Mar 03. Complete details are in MARADMIN 125/03 on the Marine Corps website. Impact to SOUTHCOM assigned units is currently being assessed.

## RESERVISTS/GUARD:

### Act May Protect Active-Duty Reservists

*by Master Sgt. Scott Elliott*

*Air Force Print News*

03/25/03 - **WASHINGTON --** *Guardsmen and reservists called to active duty to fight the global war on terror may seek credit protection under a law passed to aid GIs in an earlier global war. The Soldiers' and Sailors' Civil Relief Act of 1940 protects military members from certain legal obligations while they are actively engaged in national defense.*

Among the Act's chief provisions is its ability to reduce interest rates on debts incurred before active-duty status, protect servicemembers and their families from eviction, and delay civil court actions. But it is not automatic. For servicemembers to take advantage of the act, individual servicemembers should notify their creditors of the active-duty status and their intent to invoke their civil relief act rights. Sometimes, however, creditors do not strictly adhere to the letter of the law, even when they are given proper notice. In one case about to enter litigation, a Reserve airman from California is depending on the power of the American Bar Association to help him pick up the pieces of his shattered financial life. According to Col. John S. Odom Jr., a Reserve legal officer temporarily assigned to 8th Air Force at Barksdale Air Force Base, La., the reservist in question is a master sergeant who owned a construction company, a home and a boat before being activated for a year. Now, just two months after coming off active duty, the Travis AFB, Calif., noncommissioned officer's creditors are threatening to foreclose on his home and his boat, his life savings is gone, his credit is wrecked and his company is in limbo. "He's a classic poster child for the act," Odom said. Odom said while most of the creditors complied with the sergeant's request for relief, several did not. Now, immediately after the sergeant has come off active duty, all his creditors are demanding



immediate payment of everything he owes them -- just as he is trying to get his business re-started. The key point of contention, Odom said, is ***a provision in the law that allows a reservist to seek a moratorium on continuing obligations for a period equal to the time spent on active duty, to give the servicemember time to recover financially.*** The ABA's committee on legal assistance to military personnel has agreed to represent the sergeant, without charge, to help publicize the act.

"He's a dream client, as far as documentation goes," Odom said. "He's kept copies of everything."

***While all servicemembers receive some protections under the act, additional rights are specifically geared toward members of the Reserve community who are mobilized. Department of Defense officials said March 19 that 212,617 reservists and guardsmen had been called to active duty. Specifically, rights under the act include:***

- Limiting interest rates to 6 percent for all debts incurred before beginning active-duty service. This provision includes interest rates on credit cards, mortgages and auto loans. It does not apply to federal student loans.
  - Protecting family members from eviction during times of active-duty service, regardless of whether the lease was signed before or after activation. If the monthly lease is \$1,200 or less, a landlord must seek a court order to authorize an eviction.
  - Prohibiting repossessions and foreclosures without court permission.
  - Postponing civil lawsuits the servicemember is a direct party to, such as bankruptcy.
  - Extending deadlines to file law suits by eliminating time served on active duty from calculating any statute of limitations.
  - Protecting active-duty people from taxation by states other than by their state of domicile.
  - Prohibiting creditors and insurance companies from making adverse credit reports, denying credit or taking adverse financial action against a servicemember based solely on invocation of the act.
- For more information, contact local legal assistance offices.

## **ALL PERSONNEL**

### **Bill Would Allow Offering Recruits Tax-Free Repayment Of Student Loans**

By Stephen Barr

Many college graduates interested in public service decide against applying for a federal job because of their student loans, surveys show. As they get ready to leave college, students burdened by debt usually opt for the highest-paying job available, and, more often than not, it's in the private sector. To help federal agencies recruit college graduates, ***a bipartisan group of lawmakers introduced a bill yesterday that would permit the government to offer tax-free loan repayments.*** Under law, agencies can repay student loans on behalf of employees -- up to \$6,000 a year with a lifetime limit of \$40,000. The benefit is subject to withholding at the time the repayment is made. Rep. Thomas M. Davis III (R-Va.), a chief sponsor of the tax-free repayment bill, said the legislation would put the government on par with loan forgiveness programs sponsored by educational institutions and nonprofit organizations. Loan repayments made by such groups to encourage public service are not counted as taxable income for the recipient. The bill "levels the playing field," Davis said. ***The proposal to provide federal employees with tax-free student loan repayment is a key initiative of the Partnership for Public Service, a nonpartisan group seeking to revitalize the civil service.*** A similar proposal was introduced in Congress last year but was never put to a vote....According to the Partnership for Public Service, the typical college debt burden runs \$14,000 to \$16,000 for undergraduates and more than \$20,000 for graduate students. Two years ago, the Office of Personnel Management issued regulations allowing

agencies to repay student loans. The State Department, the General Accounting Office and a few other agencies have implemented loan repayment programs. Government employees who receive student loan repayments must agree to stay in federal service for no less than three years.

## **Global War on Terrorism Medals.**

President Bush has issued an executive order establishing two military awards for actions in the global war on terrorism (GWOT). The **GWOT Expeditionary Medal** will be awarded to service members (SM) who serve in military expeditions to combat terrorism on or after 11 Sep 01. Personnel assigned to operations in Afghanistan and the Philippines are examples of SM who will receive the award. The **GWOT Service Medal** will be issued to SM who serve in military operations to combat terrorism on or after 11 Sep 01. Operation Noble Eagle is an example of the type of operation the medal may be awarded for. DoD and military service officials, including the Coast Guard, are working on provisions to award the medals. For more details about and images of these new awards, please visit: [www.defenselink.mil/news/Mar2003/n03132003\\_200303134.html](http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Mar2003/n03132003_200303134.html).

## **MISCELLANEOUS AND FAMILY ISSUES**

### **Most Airlines Change Luggage Weight Limits**

*by Cynthia Bauer*

*Air Mobility Command Public Affairs*

03/29/03 - **SCOTT AIR FORCE BASE, ILL. (AFPN) --** *Most major airlines have changed their checked baggage policy concerning weight limits and excess charges for luggage on domestic flights, according to Air Mobility Command transportation officials. These changes will affect military travelers. "The carriers will continue to accept luggage up to 100 pounds per piece but with significant fees will be charged after luggage exceeds their weight limits,"* said John Lundebly, a traffic management specialist with Air Mobility Command headquarters. *"Most airlines allow two pieces of luggage, 50 pounds maximum each, to be checked free of charge. Bags exceeding 50 pounds, but less than 70 pounds, will be assessed an excess-baggage fee, normally around \$25 per bag. Bags between 70 and 100 pounds will be charged additional fees, normally around \$80 per bag. Bags weighing over 100 pounds will not be accepted."* Waivers are available to all military members, including active duty, Guard, Reserve and Coast Guard. *"The airlines do offer waivers to allow military personnel on orders to check luggage that weighs over the limit, but not to exceed 70 pounds, without paying an additional charge,"* said Lundebly. *"But each airline has its own rules of what will be accepted without an additional charge. "Some airlines also restrict the waiver to types of luggage,"* he said. *"For instance, one airline will apply the weight waiver to only one bag, which must be a military-issue bag, such as a duffel bag or B-4 bag." The waivers do not apply to family members or to Defense Department civilians, even if they are on official travel, and do not apply to servicemembers on leisure travel. Carriers with domestic flights, including Northwest Airlines, American Airlines, United Airlines and Delta Airlines have already put new policies into effect. Continental Airlines has announced they will make changes to their policy April 15.* *"The best advice I can give travelers is to check with the airlines on the weight restrictions before traveling, either through the carrier's Web site or by calling their toll-free number,"* said Lundebly. Ticket agents and local traffic management offices can access each carrier's baggage rules and waivers through their computer reservation system. *"If you think your checked bags will exceed 50 pounds each, make sure you have excess baggage authorized (on) your official orders,"* he said. *"Travel pay will not reimburse you for excess baggage fees unless you have this authorization."* Lundebly said that travelers on AMC Patriot

Express flights are allowed two checked bags at 70 pounds maximum for each bag. Commanders may approve excess baggage in the traveler's orders. Passengers on AMC space-available flights have the same limit of two bags at 70 pounds each; however space-A travelers are not authorized excess baggage. (Courtesy of AMC News Service)

### **5,500 UP FOR GRABS IN ARMED FORCES JOINT WARFIGHTING ESSAY CONTEST**

ANNAPOLIS, MD--1 May is the deadline for the annual Armed Forces Joint Warfighting Essay Contest sponsored by the Naval Institute and The Boeing Company. This contest is open to anyone and winning essays are published in the October issue of Proceedings magazine. Essays should pertain to combat readiness in a joint context - persuasive discussions of tactics, strategy, weaponry, combat training, force structure, doctrine, operations, organization for combat, interoperability of hardware and procedures or other issues involving two or more services. Read the 2002 first-prize essay winner online in the October 2002 issue of Proceedings at

<http://www.navalinstitute.org/Proceedings/PRO2002toc.htm#oct>.

Armed Forces Joint Warfighting Essay Contest

First Prize: \$2,500

Second Prize: \$2,000

Third Prize: \$1,000

Maximum Length: 3,000 words

Topic: Any subject relating to combat issues in a joint context. Essays may be heavy in single-service detail but must have joint application

Open: To all

**Deadline: 1 May, 2003**

Go to <http://www.navalinstitute.org> for additional contest details. Naval Institute -The U.S. Naval Institute is a membership organization whose mission is to contribute to the nation's security by providing an open forum where ideas and issues important to the Sea Services in particular and the other military services in general can be advanced. The U.S. Naval Institute publishes Proceedings and Naval History magazines and more than 800 professional books. For more information, visit <http://www.navalinstitute.org>.

### **Army Knowledge Online Provides Secure Communications**

(Source: U.S. Army Public Affairs)

***Army Knowledge Online (AKO) allows family members the ability to rapidly access general knowledge about the Army and to keep in touch with their soldiers across a secure communications channel while at home station or during deployments.*** Every family member of a soldier is eligible for an AKO account/e-mail address. A family member merely needs to sign in as a new user and request a guest account; their soldier must serve as their sponsor. Once a soldier approves a family member's request, the soldier and family member are connected in a trusted sector of cyber space. They can exchange e-mail, chat online, and engage in instant messaging. And it's free! For additional information, log on to: [Army Knowledge Online](#).

## **Child-Care Test Program Provides Peace of Mind**

*by Staff Sgt. C. Todd Lopez*

*Air Force Print News*

03/11/03 - **WASHINGTON** -- Airmen who use base child-care facilities no longer need to take a day off of work when their children are too sick to stay with others. ***A test program began recently at 25 Air Force installations designating a special-care provider for children who are mildly ill -- children who would, under Air Force rules, not be allowed to stay in base child-care facilities with healthy children.*** "In the past, parents have had to either take leave or find another care setting and pay additional costs when their children had a mild illness," said Beverly Houston, family member program specialist in the Air Force services directorate at the Pentagon. "This program will allow the parent to still perform their military duty and avoid the cost of additional child-care."

***Under the program, a private-care provider at each base was selected by the family child-care panel and specially trained to deal with mildly ill children. Additionally, during the selection process, the Air Force looked first to those providers who already had special skills.*** "We looked for people who may be a registered nurse or another specialized provider," Houston said. When children who are already in base child-care become sick, their parents pick them up and take them to the special-care provider until they are well enough to be in their regular child-care setting again. ***Keesler Air Force Base, Miss., is one of the first Air Force installations to begin the program. Parents who took advantage of it were happy with the care and convenience provided.*** "I am glad I could bring my child," said Staff Sgt. Mindy Sarratt, one of the first users of the program at Keesler AFB. "The mildly ill care provider is great with my children and makes me feel comfortable leaving them in her care."

Col. Lyndsay Stauffer, a first time user of the Keesler program, had similar compliments.

"This brings me peace of mind," Stauffer said. ***If the program proves successful during the five-month test phase and additional funding is approved, Air Force services will expand the program to all installations where it is needed.***

The other test bases for the program include Andrews AFB, Md.; Bolling AFB, D.C.; Edwards AFB, Calif.; Elmendorf AFB, Alaska; Hickam AFB, Hawaii; Hulburt Field, Fla. (also serving Eglin AFB, Fla.); Kadena Air Base, Japan; Kirtland AFB, N.M.; Lackland AFB, Texas; Royal Air Force Lakenheath, England; Langley AFB, Va.; Little Rock AFB, Ark.; MacDill AFB, Fla.; McChord AFB, Wash.; McGuire AFB, N.J.; Misawa AB, Japan; Nellis AFB, Nev.; Peterson AFB, Colo.; Ramstein AB, Germany; Scott AFB, Ill.; Tinker AFB, Okla.; Travis AFB, Calif.; Vandenberg AFB, Calif.; and Yokota AB, Japan.

## **U.S. Government Suggests Ways to Support the Troops**

**By Diego Ibarguen, Knight Ridder Newspapers**

European edition, Wednesday, March 26, 2003

WASHINGTON — Want to show your support for U.S. soldiers and their families as the war in Iraq continues? The Bush administration has compiled an Internet-based list to help you do so. The resources and suggestions, collectively called "On the Homefront," include information on how to send e-mail, electronic thank-you cards and care packages to deployed troops and how to contact charity groups that offer assistance to military families. Through "Operation Dear Abby"

(<http://anyservicemember.navy.mil>), e-mail can be sent to deployed troops of any service. "Defend America" (<http://www.defendamerica.mil/nmam.html>) contains a thank-you card to troops. The U.S. military set up both services. Through "Operation USA Care Package"

(<http://www.usocares.org/home.htm>), donations are accepted for purchasing items requested by troops, such as sunscreen, disposable cameras, prepaid calling cards and toiletries. That is a project sponsored by the United Services Organization, a non-profit group that supports the U.S. military, and America Online Inc. Several civic organizations offer ways for volunteers to help local military families with such things as household repairs, spring cleaning, tutoring and child care. The groups include the American Legion, American Red Cross, Boys & Girls Clubs of America, Benevolent & Protective Order of Elks of the USA, National 4-H Council, The Salvation Army, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the YMCA. The Bush administration outline also suggests volunteering locally to help by mentoring children, teaching someone to read or working in a food shelter.

The "On the Homefront" options are detailed on the USA Freedom Corps Web site ([www.usafreedomcorps.gov](http://www.usafreedomcorps.gov)). Or you can call 877-USA-CORPS, where you will find a recorded message from President Bush and then a menu of options leading to information on federal community service programs.

### **GI Mail Provides Secure, Reliable E-mail Link to Loved Ones**

*by Cynthia Bauer*

*Air Mobility Command Public Affairs*

03/10/03 - **SCOTT AIR FORCE BASE, ILL. (AFPN)** -- With airmen deployed away from home, the opportunity to communicate with loved ones takes on greater importance. "To provide a link back home, *Air Force Crossroads, the Air Force's official community Web site, offers a secure and reliable e-mail program through Global Internet Mail to help families keep in touch,*" said **Capt. Greg Whitaker of the Air Mobility Command Network Operations and Security Center here.** *"Although there are other nonprofit and commercial e-mail and Internet services available, military members need to understand GI Mail is sponsored and maintained by the Air Force.* We can't verify the operational capability or security of other such services," he said.

**Registration for GI Mail is free for those eligible through the Air Force Crossroads Web site at [www.afcrossroads.com](http://www.afcrossroads.com).** Airmen can log in to the Web-based system from any computer with Internet access. ***Eligible users include active duty, Reserve, National Guard, retired or civil service employees and their authorized family members.*** Whitaker said there are three great reasons to use GI Mail: security, bandwidth and availability. "You've probably heard about the various break-ins and hacker attacks at free commercial e-mail providers," he said. ***GI Mail is a Department of Defense system,*** employing the same great security you've grown accustomed to in AMC," he said.

***Concerning bandwidth, there is no advertising or "spamming" from junk mail distributors on GI Mail, unlike commercial providers. "Not only will the service remain speedy even in the most remote or forward locations, users will not spend time sifting through mountains of junk mail,"*** Whitaker said. ***"And GI Mail is a DOD product provided for morale.*** Unlike civilian services, the system will get the attention and maintenance that our deployed personnel deserve." Besides GI Mail, the ***Air Force Crossroads Web site also offers forums and online chat rooms, and has online videoconferencing tools under development.*** Access the Web site and click on "Communications Center" for additional information. According to CeCe Medford, chief of AMC's Family Matters Branch, families who do not have computers or Internet access can rely on family support centers for help. "Our family support centers have gone the extra mile to ensure families can stay in touch, even without a home computer," she said. "The Family Support Centers have computers with connections to Internet service providers available for families to use."

Medford said that family readiness noncommissioned officers can explain videoconferencing, how to borrow digital and video cameras, how to sign up for morale calls, and special family activities.

### **Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) Awarded Special Education Funding**

(Source: American Forces Press Service) *(Mostly a DoDDs Impact Issue)*

***DoDEA asked for and received an additional \$56.6 million to improve special education programs for its students with disabilities.*** The money will begin flowing in fiscal year 2004 and be parceled over the next six years. After a year of monitoring, interviewing, and observing the special education programs of more than 30 stateside and overseas schools, the focus group presented DoDEA and the Defense Department with the following recommendations:

- \* Provide additional special education professionals to help with student evaluations, record keeping, and testing to allow teachers more time to teach.
  - \* Provide additional man-hours and workdays to allow special education paraprofessionals more time to spend with special and regular education teachers before and after the student school day.
  - \* Increase training and professional development for special-needs educators, regular classroom teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators, and parents.
  - \* Purchase curriculum materials for special education students with disabilities.
  - \* Purchase special and adaptive equipment such as standing tables, motorized changing tables, and equipment to support students with moderate to severe disabilities while standing, sitting, and moving.
- Special education students make up about 10 percent of DoDEA's 220 schools' population.***

### **NASA Space Camp Scholarship**

The Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) has endowed a NASA Space Camp scholarship in memory of Bernard Curtis Brown II, who was killed on September 11, 2001. The scholarship will fully fund the tuition and travel for a student to attend the NASA Space Camp this summer. Applicants must be a child of active duty military status and a student between 6th-9th grades before the entry deadline of May 15, 2003. The recipient of the 2003 Bernard Curtis Brown II Memorial Space Camp Scholarship will be notified by June 13, 2003 and presented with the scholarship at the MCEC national conference in Mystic/Groton, CT on July 25, 2003. Additional information and an application can be found at the MCEC website at [www.militarychild.org](http://www.militarychild.org).